

Charlie Monk

The Least Bit Bashful

The Honorary (and self-proclaimed) Mayor of Music Row, Charlie Monk, has a lot of firsts under his belt. He hosted the first daily broadcast from Music Row. He signed Kenny Chesney to his first songwriting deal. He's also co-founder of a little event called Country Radio Seminar, and he hosted New Faces for more than 40 years. Somewhere over the course of a decades-long career, Monk realized he'll never be the best anyone else. But he'll always be the best Charlie Monk.

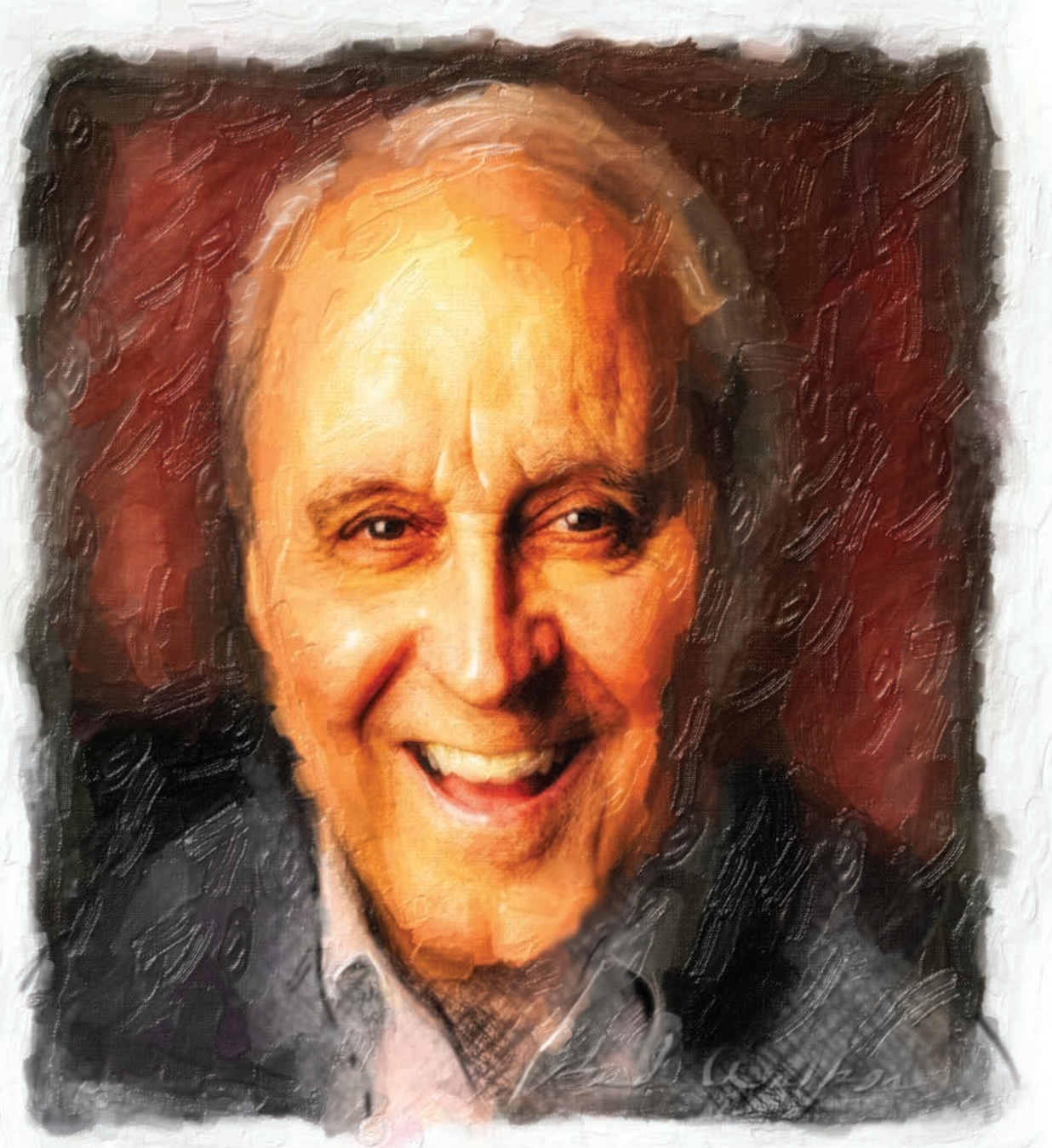
My story is a little different in the sense that a lot of people think I made my bones in the music business and don't realize I started in radio in 1956. Which is quite a 60-year career, you know? Tom McEntee and I were the guys that kind of pulled together CRS. Over the years when we finally started the Hall of Fame, I was actually the first chairman of the event. From that, a lot of people thought I either went into it or I didn't qualify because I was in the music business. Later on, CRS honored me with the President's Award, and a lot of people got confused because they thought that was the night I went into the Hall of Fame. I've had a lot of careers – voice work, acting, songwriting, publishing and I've managed talent. I've told so many lies about my career, I never know which ones I should focus on.

The most fascinating thing, of course, is meeting the artists, but I think I've always felt differently about radio. I always thought I was as important as the music, because everybody has the music, but not everybody had Charlie Monk on their radio station. Radio is communication between two people. I happen to play records, but I was hopeful that people would tune in to my radio show to hear my silliness, my stories or me just being ridiculous. I've been a radio fan since I was a child, but I've enjoyed the characters as much as the music. Radio was a world I wanted to be part of because I wanted to be an actor. I realized God gave me wit, charm, good looks – everything except talent. Had he given me a talent, I'd have been a superstar.

I lived in a small town. We didn't have concerts, so I never got to meet a celebrity until I actually left my hometown, wound up in Mobile, AL and went to work for a radio and television station. This was 1959. The TV station did a live morning show, and one of its stars was the Carter Family's Anita Carter and her husband Don Davis, who was a famous steel guitar player. They brought in a guy from Georgia who had just released a record – Bill Anderson. He was a nobody working at a small radio station. I was a nobody, too. So he was the first celebrity I ever met. I was awed by that, and I've been awed by that man ever since.

Jim Reeves' widow, Mary, brought me to town. She bought a station in Murfreesboro, TN, WMTS. I had programmed the No. 1 station in Mobile and we became friends, so they brought me up to program and be on-air. I was the first person to do a daily interview show from Music Row. All the *Grand Ole Opry* stars would come by – Marty Robbins, Reeves, Little Jimmy Dickens – you name them. More importantly, I got to play the records about the time that they were recorded, because they would bring the acetates.

One of my favorite stories is getting invited to host a gospel concert at the White House when Jimmy Carter was President, which was really an unusual thing for a boy from South Alabama. There were 3,500 people and the most powerful man in the world, and I'm doing what I did, introducing acts. Another memory has to do with the music business in 1974. Frank Sinatra came to town, and they invited me to a cocktail party



You Make Me Feel So Fun: With Ol' Blue Eyes.

Monk-y Business: With Tim McGraw.



for him and about 50 people. He was one of the biggest acts in the world at the time. I idolized Sinatra. He was my favorite singer of all time. He walked right up to me and stuck out his hand saying, "Hi, I'm Frank Sinatra." I thought, "Yeah, you really are, you know."

I'm still fascinated by radio. We've taken the personality out of it and made the music the most important thing. That's been a mistake for a lot of reasons. Nashville's had some of the greatest radio personalities – not just somebody who introduced music. Arthur Godfrey said, "Make sure that if you're on the air, speak as though you're speaking to one person multiplied by the thousands who might be listening." Never try to talk to a group. When I go to a concert they yell, "How are you all doing?" I think, hey, stick to me. I came. I paid. Or when somebody in radio goes, "Well, I'm glad you all are listening." Well, there's nobody in the car but me. So, I treat it a little differently, and maybe that's because I came from a different era.

I hosted and produced New Faces for more than 40 years, so I introduced at least 400 acts to radio. I got to introduce Tim McGraw when the whole music and radio business first heard "Don't Take The Girl," which was an amazing, fall-down, astonishing moment. But, I'd never heard it, and nobody in the audience had ever heard it. To have introduced Alabama, Brooks & Dunn, George Strait ... I can go on and on.

I had good instincts, and I was doing what I wanted to do. I was in show business, but I wasn't the person out front. Radio gave me that opportunity a lot of times, but I'm a showbiz groupie. I love hanging around with talented people. They make me feel important. Over the years, I've found that I had some reluctance to stick my hand out, but eventually got to the point I would stick out my hand every time. If I walked up to you this morning, I'd say, "Hi, I'm Charlie Monk." If I ran into you in the afternoon, I'd stop and say, "Hi, I'm Charlie Monk." I finally realized that I was the best Charlie Monk in town. I was not the best anybody else. I tried to be a better Charlie Monk when I went to radio, because my job was to *be* Charlie Monk. **CAC**